



ESSEX SU
IMPACT
REPORT
2025/26

LORNA ELLIOTT-SKINNER
MARKETING DIRECTOR



INTRO

This year, Essex SU represented and supported more than 13,000 students across Colchester, Southend and Loughton. Focused on one thing: Bringing our vision of becoming the World's Most Student-Centred Organisation to life.

Students faced significant challenges. Rising living costs. Academic pressures. Industrial action. The announcement of the Southend Campus closure.

Our role was simple: stand shoulder to shoulder with them.

This report tells the story of how students found their people, grew their confidence, used their voice, accessed support and succeeded at Essex. Not through a list of activities. But through the difference their Students' Union made.

This year, we set out to celebrate our contribution through stories and data. This report is how we prove it.



87% OF STUDENTS SAID THE SU HAD A POSITIVE IMPACT ON THEIR EXPERIENCE

Across our student insight surveys this year, 87% of students said Essex SU had a positive impact on their university experience.

Behind that figure are thousands of student stories.

Finding their people.

Creating change.

Accessing support.

Building confidence.

Making the most of university.

Here's what some of them had to say:

"The Students' Union had a positive impact on my experience because it provides a good range of events and activities that help students feel involved and connected. It creates opportunities to meet new people, take part in social and academic activities, and feel part of the university community."

"I gave a 10/10 because the Essex SU has been incredible at supporting students and creating a great community on campus all year. The events and activities organised by the SU are always engaging, well-run, and inclusive. Additionally, their advocacy work, academic support, and dedication to ensuring the student voice is heard makes a huge difference in our daily university experience. It feels like a union that genuinely cares about student wellbeing and success."

"It gave life to campus!!! The community markets, the SU Makes events, and the support given generally across the SU all made what was a pretty naff academic year worthwhile."

AT A GLANCE

A year of impact, powered by students.



81%

of students said Essex
SU had a positive
impact



76%

of students said
they felt like they
belonged at Essex



98%

of students said
they felt welcomed
at Essex



16,121

signatures for
Pay the Placement



1,000+

students attended
SU Squares Fest



10,183+

student survey
responses



40,845

volunteering
hours



10

BUCS league titles &
700 students
competing for Blades



3,450

students voted in
SU elections



2,250+

students in jobs or
exec roles at the SU



143

Student led
Societies (103) and
Sports Clubs (40)



1,166

students supported
by SU Advice

THE ESSEX SU WAY

Everything we do starts with one question:

Does this make life better for students?

It's the question that shapes our decisions, our priorities and our ambition to become the World's Most Student-Centred Organisation.

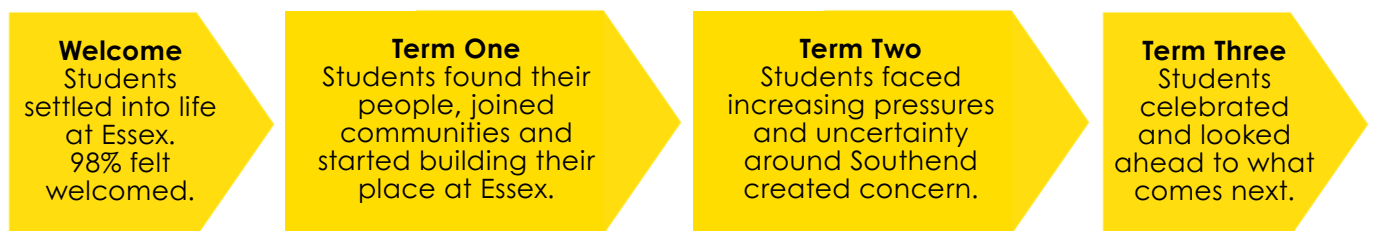
This report isn't organised by departments or services.

It's organised around what students experience as members of **Essex SU, our membership pillars:**

- Find your people. Feel at home.
- Grow your own way. No pressure.
- Use your voice. Make change happen.
- Get support when you need it.
- Get a great degree + dream job.

This report is organised by what students experience as members of Essex SU.

THE STUDENT EXPERIENCE IN 2025/26



Throughout it all, Essex SU stood shoulder to shoulder with students.

We helped students find belonging, create change, access support and make the most of their time at Essex.

The next five sections show what that looked like for students...

**FIND
YOUR
PEOPLE
FEEL AT HOME**

FIND YOUR PEOPLE. FEEL AT HOME.



Belonging starts with feeling welcome.

Throughout the year, Essex SU created opportunities for students to connect, build friendships and find a place where they belonged.

SU impact by numbers

💛 **98%** of first-year students felt **welcomed**.

🏠 **76%** said they felt they **belonged** at Essex.

🎉 119 Welcome events delivered

👋 103 active Societies

🎊 1,543 Society events

⚽ 2,214 Blades members

💚 502 students taking part in VTeam one-off and regular projects



Built belonging from day one

Welcome is often a student's first experience of university life.

SU impact by numbers

- 💛 119 Welcome events
- 🎉 1,941 students engaged
- 👏 4,581 event attendances
- 🌍 491 postcards sent to 56 countries

From the moment students arrived, Essex SU created opportunities to meet new people, discover communities and start feeling at home.

Students could choose from 119 Welcome events, including SU Freshers Fair, SU Makes, club nights, social events and community activities, with 92% free to attend. Across the programme, 1,941 students took part, generating 4,581 attendances.

At the heart of Welcome was the SU Welcome Hub. Now in its third year, it provided a friendly space to ask questions, access support and make connections. Students also sent 491 free postcards to 56 countries, helping them stay connected with home while making Essex their new one.

Together, these experiences helped **98% of students say they felt welcomed at Essex.**

For thousands of students, Essex SU wasn't just where university started. It was where they found their people.

"I arrived at university not knowing anyone and worried about fitting in. Through SU events like Binglow, What A Drag and SU Freshers Fair, I met some of the people who are now my closest friends."



Creating successful Student-Led Communities

Student-led communities continued to thrive throughout the year.

🧠 103 SU Societies

- 23 new SU Societies
- 1,543 Society events
- 3,463 SU Society memberships

❤️ 40 Essex Blades Sports Clubs

- 700+ students competed
- 10 BUCS league titles
- 2,214 Essex Blades Sports Club memberships

From academic interests and cultural celebrations to hobbies and faith groups, societies provided students with opportunities to connect, develop friendships and pursue shared passions.

Sport also plays a vital role in helping students find their people and feel part of something bigger.

Derby Day also brought together:

- 450 competitors
- 1,000+ participants
- 48 fixtures
- 203 volunteering hours

Students achieved success at regional and national level while building confidence, friendships and a strong sense of belonging.



♥ VTeam Community

- 284 students taking part in VTeam one-offs
- 218 students taking part in VTeam Regular Projects
- 36 large scale one-off projects
- 480 Regular Project volunteering sessions

VTeam is more than volunteering. It's a community.

Alongside volunteering opportunities, students came together through project socials, termly VTeam events and shared experiences that helped build lasting friendships.

The impact was clear. 82% of volunteers said VTeam helped them meet new people and feel less isolated, while 70% said it helped them feel part of the local community.

"What do I like most about VTeam? The community. VTeam is where I have made many friends and gotten to experience lots. My roles currently are session leader and social media, I enjoy both roles and all projects I have taken part in."



Celebrating community & culture

Throughout the year, students came together through cultural celebrations, community events and shared experiences that strengthened their sense of belonging at Essex.

From Diwali, Holi, Black History Month and LGBTQ+ History Month to a programme of Ramadan events culminating in a Grand Iftar led by the Islamic Society, students celebrated the diversity of the Essex community while creating opportunities to connect, learn and share experiences.

Student communities also created new traditions. The inaugural South Asian Cup, organised collaboratively by the Indian, Pakistani and Tamil societies, brought students together for a two-day cricket and football tournament, celebrating culture, friendship and community through sport.

The year concluded with the annual Societies and Sports Awards, bringing together 440 students across two nights to celebrate the individuals and groups who make Essex SU communities thrive. Islamic Society was named Society of the Year, recognising its outstanding contribution to campus life, while Pole Dance was awarded Club of the Year for its achievements both on and off the competition floor.

Student Leaders also supported student communities through initiatives such as SU Community Markets, raising more than £6,000 for charities, or for Societies and Sports Clubs to reinvest in activities for students.

🎉 Ending the year together

The academic year concluded with SU Squares Fest on Friday 5 June. More than 1,000 students attended the sold-out event, which showcased the creativity, talent and diversity of the Essex student community through student DJs, dance performances, live music and student-led activities.

The event provided a fitting end to the academic year, bringing students together to celebrate their achievements, friendships and experiences at Essex. Students also took home a personalised souvenir, creating their own custom t-shirt or tote bag at the SU's customisation station.

And yes, CEO Craig distributed 1,500 Corky's shots throughout the evening 🍹.

"Squares Fest was the best event I went to in all 4 years at uni."

"My friends and I haven't stopped talking about it."



From Welcome Week to SU Squares Fest, Essex SU helped students build friendships, create memories and find a place where they belonged.

**GROW
YOUR
OWN WAY
NO PRESSURE**

GROW YOUR OWN WAY. NO PRESSURE.



University looks different for everyone. Some students volunteer.
Some lead. Some gain paid work experience.
Others simply try something new.

SU impact by numbers

- 🌱 939 student volunteers
- 🕒 6,916 VTeam volunteering hours
- 💼 212 student staff employed
- 🚀 10 student leadership roles elected (4 Student Leaders + 6 SCOs)
- 🏆 Platinum Sustainability Award

Building skills through work

For many students, Essex SU is also their first employer.

This year, 212 students worked across the Students' Union, gaining paid employment alongside their studies while developing transferable skills in communication, teamwork, customer service and leadership. These roles not only support the delivery of Essex SU services but help students build confidence and experience for future careers.

Developing future leaders

Students stepped into leadership across Essex SU as Student Leaders, Student Community Officers, Society Committee Members, Sports Executives, VTeam Project Leads and Student Representatives, developing confidence, leadership and employability skills.



Volunteering

VTeam gave hundreds of students the opportunity to develop new skills while making a positive difference to local communities and the environment. Across 12 regular volunteering projects, students supported schools, charities and community organisations, delivered sustainability initiatives and helped tackle loneliness, food waste and digital exclusion. Together they contributed **6,916 hours of volunteering** throughout the year.

In recognition of this impact, VTeam received the **University's Platinum Sustainability Award**, celebrating the contribution of projects including Repair Café, Green Thumbs and Clothes Exchange.

"VTeam gives students the opportunity to develop skills they wouldn't normally gain through their course, while having fun and making a positive impact through volunteering." - Matthew van de Vyver, Repair Café Project Leader

♥ Student Volunteering Week 2026 Impact

- 246 students took part
- 1170.5 hours of volunteering
- 33 volunteering opportunities including a huge project with Colchester Zoo, a school STEM Day, Wildlife Habitat Builds and food drive for Colchester Foodbank.

USE YOUR VOICE

MAKE CHANGE HAPPEN

USE YOUR VOICE. MAKE CHANGE HAPPEN.



Student-centred means more than listening.

It means ensuring students have the power to influence the decisions that affect their experiences, shape the future of Essex SU and create change beyond our campuses.

SU impact by numbers

- 📦 3,450 election voters
- ✍️ Secured 16,121 Pay The Placement petition signatures
- 📢 315 Student Reps
- 🗨️ 92 Student Voice Groups
- ✍️ 10,183+ survey responses
- ✅ 19 students stood for Student Leader elections
- 💛 12 students applied to become Student Community Officers
- 😊 4 Student Leaders + 6 SCOs appointed to lead & represent



Student voice in action

At the heart of our academic representation system are **315 Student Representatives**, working alongside staff to improve teaching, learning and the overall student experience.

Throughout the year they gathered feedback from their coursemates, identified issues and celebrated what was working well, ensuring every cohort had a voice. That feedback was then discussed through **92 Student Voice Groups**, bringing together Student Reps and University staff to turn student experiences into meaningful improvements.

Alongside this, more than 10,000 survey responses gave students another powerful way to influence decisions across both Essex SU and the University, ensuring priorities were driven by evidence as well as individual experiences.

From voice to action

Student voice doesn't stop at being heard. It leads to action.

Student Leaders represented students on University committees, regional and national forums; ensuring student perspectives influenced decisions at every level. Through SU Council, students debated ideas, challenged decisions and voted on the future direction of Essex SU. This year, SU Council:

- Held two Extraordinary meetings with the Vice-Chancellor, Pro Vice-Chancellor (Education) and Trade Union representatives.
- Approved plans to introduce paid Student Community Officer roles.
- Updated voting procedures to make democratic decision-making more accessible.



Students also passed policies to:

- Introduce mandatory bystander training for Society Executives, Sports Club Committees and Council Members.
- Call on the University to review partnerships with arms manufacturers and strengthen ethical partnership guidelines.
- Increase financial transparency through regular reports to SU Council.
- Renew Essex SU's definition of Islamophobia in support of Muslim students and communities.

"I felt very involved in making positive change for students through my role as a Student Rep. It allowed me to help shape discussions and make sure students' concerns were heard."



A national campaign led by Essex students

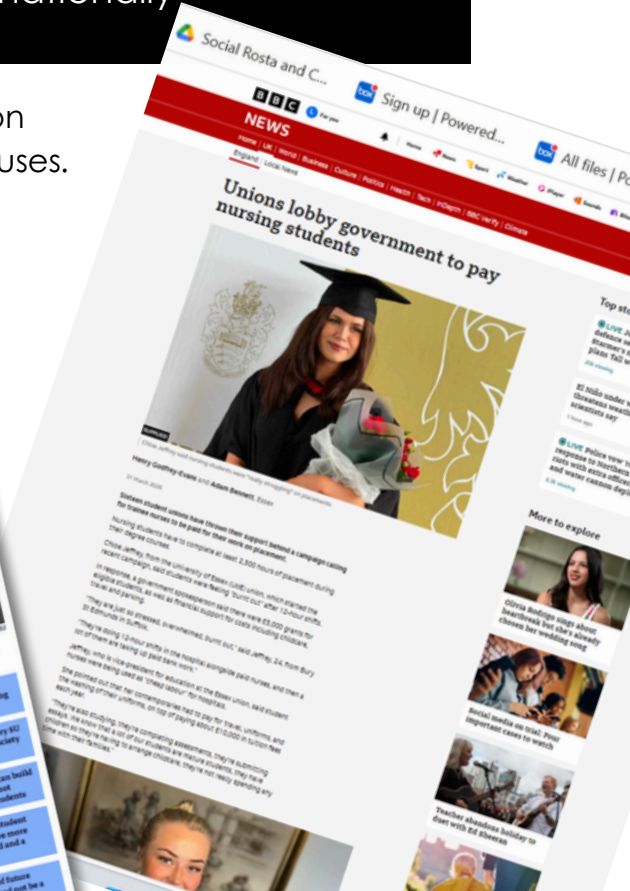
Pay the Placement became one of the most significant examples of student voice in action.

Led by Essex SU and healthcare students, the campaign called for mandatory healthcare placements to be paid.

Pay the Placement success

- 👉 Secured 16,121 petition signatures
- 🤝 United more than 20 Students' Unions
- 📰 Generated national media coverage
- 😊 Secured a government response
- 🗺️ Amplified healthcare student voices nationally

The campaign demonstrated how student-led action at Essex can create influence far beyond our campuses.



**GET
SUPPORT
WHEN YOU
NEED IT**

GET SUPPORT WHEN YOU NEED IT.



Support can make the difference between struggling and succeeding. Whether students needed independent advice, practical help or someone to guide them through a difficult situation, Essex SU was there when it mattered most.

SU impact by numbers

- ♥ 1,166 students supported
- ? 9,498 advice interactions
- 📚 41% of casework supported students with academic issues
- 💰 129 hardship loans issued
- ★ 96.2% of students rated the service Good or Very Good

Independent advice when it mattered most

This year, SU Advice supported **1,166 students** through **9,498 interactions**, providing free, independent and confidential advice.

Students sought support on a wide range of issues, with academic casework accounting for 41% of all advice, followed by academic offence cases (20%) and financial concerns (10%). SU Advice also issued 129 hardship loans to students facing immediate financial difficulties.

The quality of support was rated very highly, with **96.2% of students rating the service as Good or Very Good.**

"The SU adviser was very supportive, understanding and helpful throughout a very stressful situation. They listened carefully to my concerns, reviewed all my evidence patiently and explained the process clearly. They helped me prepare for my meeting and made me feel more reassured and supported."



Practical support shaped by students

Support wasn't limited to advice.

Throughout the year, student feedback helped secure practical improvements including the continuation of **£3 student meals**, expanded affordable food options with cheaper **Meal Kits** available in The Store, the reopening of the Southend student canteen, a **free shuttle bus** between Colchester Station and campus, and **£4,000 for the Gender Affirmation Fund**.

Students also accessed trusted housing support through SU Homes, with **599 students or alumni** finding safe, affordable accommodation. The SU Homes Renters Rights campaign put students first; making sure they were informed of the changes and the impact it could have on them.

Supporting students through change

The announcement of the Southend Campus closure created significant uncertainty for more than 1,000 students.

Throughout the year, Essex SU worked to ensure students remained informed, represented and supported during a period of major change. Student Leaders championed student interests throughout discussions with the University, while regular communications, SU President updates, Extraordinary SU Council meetings and independent advice helped students understand their options and access support when they needed it most.

By standing shoulder to shoulder with students throughout the transition, Essex SU ensured their **voices remained central to decisions affecting their future**.



Supporting wellbeing

University life isn't just academically demanding, it can also be emotionally challenging.

Throughout the year, Essex SU created opportunities for students to pause, recharge and prioritise their wellbeing. From Mental Health Awareness Week and wellbeing campaigns to social sport, SU Makes activities, exam support initiatives, the much-loved SU Miniature Farm and a year-round programme of events in the SU Bar, students were encouraged to take a break, connect with others and look after both their mental and physical wellbeing.

During the Exam & Assessment Support Campaign, the SU Angels were on hand to not only hand out free refreshments but give over **2,000 students a friendly chat and moment of support and encouragement.**

Together, these small moments of support helped students feel cared for during one of the most pressured times of the academic year.

**GET A
GREAT
DEGREE
AND DREAM JOB**

GET A GREAT DEGREE + DREAM JOB.



Students come to university to change their future.
Our role is to help them succeed academically while preparing them for life beyond graduation.

SU impact by numbers

- 🏆 Ranked 18th nationally for NSS Q25 (SU academic representation)
- 📈 82% satisfaction, up 3.5% vs last year
- 💛 86% of students said Essex SU represented their academic interests in SU surveys
- 📖 1,157 views of exam advice and support content
- 💛 2,250 students stepped into employment and voluntary roles

Supporting students when it matters most

Assessment and exam season can be one of the most challenging periods of university life.

To help students succeed, Essex SU brought together academic advice, wellbeing support and practical resources into one coordinated **Exams & Assessment support** campaign, making it easier for students to find the support they needed, exactly when they needed it.

Alongside expert guidance from Essex SU, students could access online exam resources, attend wellbeing activities and take a break from revision through a range of on-campus activities and events. More than **2,000 hot drinks were served by the SU Angels Tea Trolley**, thanks to 36 staff volunteers across Colchester and Southend.

Students shared 79 messages of encouragement through **Send a Little Luck**, while **SU Miniature Farm** gave more than **300 students** the chance to step away from revision, recharge and reconnect.

Our online exam advice and support resources were viewed **1,157 times**, ensuring help was available whenever students needed it.

And finally, the SU Advice team ran a series of in-person and online **Exam Results Drop-Ins** to support students for 2 weeks in the summer.

Championing the academic experience

The strength of Essex SU's academic representation system continued to be recognised by students and nationally. Building on the work of Student Representatives, Student Voice Groups and elected Student Leaders described earlier in this report, Essex SU achieved its highest-ever performance in the National Student Survey for academic representation, **ranking 18th nationally** (Question 25). Overall, **82% of final-year students positively rated the Students' Union's** work representing their academic interests, an increase of 3.5% vs last year.

Closer to home, the Big SU End of Year Survey found that **86% of students said Essex SU represented their academic interests**, reinforcing the positive difference the SU made throughout the year.



Building skills for the future

A great degree is only part of the story. Employers are increasingly looking for graduates with real-world experience, leadership skills and evidence of initiative. Throughout the year, Essex SU provided thousands of opportunities for students to build their CVs, develop transferable skills and graduate with more than a qualification.

This year, more than **2,250 students stepped into volunteering, employment, representation or leadership roles through Essex SU:**

- 452 served on Society Executive Committees
- 285 served on Sports Club Committees
- 939 volunteered through VTeam
- 315 became Student Reps (60 completed Advanced Rep Training)
- 212 students gained paid work through Essex SU
- 60 led VTeam volunteering projects in Exec roles
- 12 students represented their peers on SU Council
- 5 students led the organisation as Student Leaders

Together, these experiences helped hundreds of students build the skills, confidence and leadership experience that will stay with them and support their future development long after graduation.

"My time as a Student Leader helped me upgrade my CV and secure a competitive two-year graduate scheme."



**THANKS FOR
READING!**